

Message Text

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21

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R 230815Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6617

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL LOURENCO MARQUES

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MASERU

AMEMBASSY MBABNE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

REF: A) GABORONE 0666 *NOTAL)

B) GABORONE 0625 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: IN MAY 20 PRESS CONFERENCE PRESIDENT KHAMA STRESSED BOTSWANA'S DESIRE FOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE RHODESIAN QUESTION AND CRITICIZED IAN SMITH'S INTRASIGENCE. HE SIDE-STEPPED QUESTIONS ON ALLOWING GUERRILLA BASES IN BOTSWANA AND ON THE POSSIBLE CLOSING OF THE BOTSWANA RAIL LINK WITH RHODESIA. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESIDENT SIR SERETSE KHAMA HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER-NOON OF MAY 20 IN WHICH HE DISCUSSED RHODESIAN QUESTION. NEWS CONFERENCE PROVIDES GOOD EXAMPLES BOTH OF KHAMA'S DEDICATION TO MAJORITY RULE IN ZIMBABWE AND HIS ABILITY TO SIDE-STEP ADROITLY WHEN NECESSARY ON POTENTIALLY EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS. PRESS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONFERENCE IS LEAD ARTICLE IN MAY 22 EDITION OF GOVERNMENT-

CONTROLLED BOTSWANA DAILY NEWS. EMBASSY HAS OBTAINED TAPE

OF THE RADIO BOTSWANA BROADCAST WHICH BRINGS OUT SOME INTERESTING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ACTUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS AND DAILY NEWS REPORTING OF THEM (PRESS CONFERENCE TRANSCRIPT WILL BE TRANSMITTED BY POUCH).

2. CALLING IAN SMITH QUOTE VER, VERY SELFISH MAN UNQUOTE, THE PRESIDENT STATED THAT ALL BOTSWANA COULD DO IS TO QUOTE CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT UNQUOTE. IN A THEME TO WHICH HE CONTINUALLY RETURNED, KHAMA STATED THAT SHOULD A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT BE UNATTAINABLE, BOTSWANA WILL HAVE TO CONSIDER CAREFULLY WHAT STEPS SHOULD BE TAKEN.

3. KHAMA COMPLETELY SIDE-STEPPED TWO QUESTIONS ON ALLOWING THE USE OF BOTSWANA'S TERRITORY FOR ANC MILITARY BASE. HE STATED THAT HE IS DOING HIS BEST TO ACHIEVE A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT WHILE APPRECIATING THE DETERMINATION OF THE QUOTE RHODESIAN PEOPLE UNQUOTE TO ACHIEVE MAJORITY RULE. PRESSED AGAIN ON BASES, KHAMA RESPONDED THAT QUOTE WE ARE ON THEIR SIDE. IF EVERYTHING ELSE FAILS AND THEY HAVE TO RESORT TO WARFARE, THEY SHALL HAVE OUR SYMPATHY UNQUOTE.

4. AN INTERESTING QUESTION AND ANSWER NOT REPORTED BY THE DAILY NEWS DEALT WITH HOW THE GOB WOULD RESPOND IF ASKED BY THE ANC TO PERMIT IT TO OPEN OFFICES IN BOTSWANA. KHAMA RESPONDED THAT, AS FAR AS HE KNEW, SOME OF THE LIBERATION ORGANIZATIONS DO HAVE OFFICES HERE. (COMMENT: EMBASSY KNOWS OF NO ANC OFFICES IN BOTSWANA. ZANU AND ZAPU OFFICES IN FRANCISTOWN WERE CLOSED SOME TIME AGO BY THOSE ORGANIZATIONS. EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICER RESPONSIBLE FOR AFRICA ADMITTED TO EMOFF THAT HE IS PUZZLED BY KHAMA'S STATEMENT AND IS CALLING OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT FOR CLARIFICATION. END COMMENT).

5. ON THE QUESTION OF BOTSWANA'S RAIL LINK WITH RHODESIA (REF B), THERE IS AN INTERESTING DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE ACTUAL QUESTION AND ANSWER AND AS REPORTED IN THE DAILY NEWS. THE QUESTION AS ASKED WAS IS RHODESIA JUSTIFIED IN BEING CONFIDENT THAT IF MOZAMBIQUE CLOSES ITS BORDER, RHODESIA CAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REROUTE ITS RAIL TRAFFIC THROUGH BEITBRIDGE AND BOTSWANA? THE PRESIDENT RESPONDED THAT RHODESIA WOULD BE HIGHLY OPTIMISTIC TO THINK IT COULD SURVIVE USING BEITBRIDGE AND BOTSWANA. EIGHT-FIVE PER CENT OF RHODESIA'S EXPORTS GO THROUGH MOZAMBIQUE AND SOUTH AFRICAN PORT (TERMINALS FOR BEITBRIDGE AND BOTSWANA RAIL LINKS) ARE CONGESTED. THE BOTSWANA DAILY NEWS ARTICLE DETECTS REFERENCES TO BOTSWANA IN BOTH THE QUESTION AND ANSWER. IMPLICATION OF KHAMA'S

REMARKS AND DAILY NEWS DELETIONS IS THAT FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST BOTSWANA DOES NOT CONTEMPLATE CLOSING RHODESIAN RAILWAY IN BOTSWANA.

6. COMMENT: VISITING LABOR ATTACHE RECEIVED SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT FORMULATION OF RAIL LINK QUESTION AFTERNOON OF MAY 20 IN DISCUSSION WITH ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING MMUSI. MMUSI, WHO HAD JUST COME FROM MORNING CABINET MEETING, SAID THAT WHEN THE TIME COMES BOTSWANA WILL BE PREPARED TO CUT THE RAIL LINK. HOWEVER, HE DID NOT GIVE AN INDICATION OF WHAT HE MEANT BY "WHEN THE TIME COMES". EMBASSY UNCERTAIN HOW MUCH THIS REFLECTS MMUSI'S PERSONAL VIEWS AND HOW MUCH IT REFLECTS POSSIBLE DISCUSSION AT CABINET MEETING.

7. AS NOTED REF B, QUESTION OF CLOSING RHODESIAN RAIL LINK THROUGH BOTSWANA IS A CRUCIAL ONE FOR THIS COUNTRY. ALMOST ALL OF ITS CONSUMER GOODS COME FROM ONE DIRECTION OR THE OTHER ON THE RAIL LINE. ITS MAJOR EXPORT, CATTLE, GOES BY RAIL TO THE THROUGH SOUTH AFRICA. ANOTHER OF ITS CRITICAL EXPORTS, COPPER-NICKLE MATTE FROM THE SELEBI-PIKWE MINE, UTILIZES THE RHODESIAN RAILWAY THROUGH RHODESIA AND MOZAMBIQUE. OF COURSE THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE MATTER COULD TRANSMIT MOZAMBIQUE IF FRELIMO EMBARGOES RHODESIA IS STILL UNANSWERED. IN THAT EVENTUALITY, BOTSWANA'S EXPORTS MIGHT ALSO FACE THE SOUTH AFRICAN PORT CONGESTION.

8. THE PRESS CONFERENCE ILLUSTRATED KHAMA'S ASTUTE CAPABILITIES AS A POLITICIAN IN WALKING THE TIGHTROPE BETWEEN PRESSURE FOR OFFER OF CONCRETE HELP TO ANC AND HIS CONTINUED POLICY TO AVOID ALLOWING GUERRILLA BASES IN BOTSWANA AND TO AVOID SETTING BACK ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN BY CLOSING BOTSWANA'S ONLY RAIL LINE. BOTSWANA'S PROBABLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONTINUING POLICY FOR THE NEAR FUTURE IS REITERATED BY KHAMA'S EXPRESSION OF "SYMPATHY" INSTEAD OF OFFERING BASES AND BY HIS EXPLANATION THAT RHODESIAN TRANSPORT DIFFICULTIES WOULD BE THE RESULT OF CONGESTED SOUTH AFRICAN PORTS AFTER GOODS HAD TRANSITED BOTSWANA OR BEITBRIDGE RATHER THAN ANNOUNCING THE INTENTION TO JOIN THE EMBARGO OF RHODESIA.
THOMSEN

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